

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 8, 2005

CATALINA ISLAND HABITAT RESTORATION

File No. 05-061
Project Manager: Mary Small

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 to the Catalina Island Conservancy to implement the Catalina Island Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program.

LOCATION: Catalina Island, Los Angeles County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Map of Invasive Plants on Catalina Island

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of up to \$100,000 to the Catalina Island Conservancy to implement the Catalina Island Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, the Catalina Island Conservancy shall submit for the review and written approval of the Conservancy’s Executive Officer a work program, including scope of work, budget and schedule, the names of any contractors it intends to use to carry out the project, and a signing plan that acknowledges Conservancy funding.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria of Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251-31270) regarding the enhancement of coastal resources.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted

by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.

3. The Catalina Island Conservancy is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U. S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) authorize a grant of up to \$100,000 to the Catalina Island Conservancy (CIC) to implement the Catalina Island Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program. This program is a comprehensive resources enhancement strategy that will protect the Island’s listed species and sensitive and rare habitats from the threat of invasive plants. The CIC has conducted extensive field surveys and developed a management strategy that targets removal of the most invasive of the non-native species while restoring native plant species.

Field survey results of the *Catalina Invasive Plant Ranking Plan* indicate that the abundance and distribution of invasive plants on Catalina is a significant threat to the native ecosystems. In response, the CIC has developed a comprehensive and holistic management program, the Catalina Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program (CHIRP) to aggressively protect the Island’s listed species and sensitive and rare habitats from the threat of invasive plants. The program will enhance 45,929 watershed acres in 68 watersheds, nearly 90% of the Island, including the following specific objectives:

- 21 priority invasive plant species of limited distribution and abundance will be completely eradicated from the 42,000 acres of the Island that the Conservancy manages.
- 2,160 satellite populations of two widespread priority invasive plant species will be removed using watersheds as target geographical areas.
- 696.3 acres will be restored
- 3.1 miles of riparian areas and 1.6 acres of rivermouth/dune areas will be enhanced by outplanting with native plant species

The Catalina Island Conservancy (CIC), a non-profit 501(c) (3) organization, has as its mission “to be a responsible steward of its land through a balance of conservation, education, and recreation”. The organization is well positioned to undertake the proposed work; the CIC owns 88% of the Island and has a long working relationship with the landowners of the remaining 12%. The CIC has agreed to manage and maintain the improvements funded under this program for twenty-five years.

The CIC staff has extensive experience implementing large complex management programs. For more than a decade the CIC has pursued an active and aggressive science-based conservation program aimed at restoring the Island ecosystems to a healthy state. The CIC has successfully conducted an Island Fox Recovery Program, removed all feral goats (*Capra hircus*) and pigs (*Sus scrofa*) from the Island, and reduced the Island’s herd of introduced American Bison (*Bison bison*) to 150 individuals. The current staff will be supplemented by new staff technicians, partnerships with the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, and many local and mainland volunteers.

Site Description: Catalina Island is the third largest of the eight California Channel Islands.

Catalina is home to six flora and fauna species that are listed as either endangered or threatened, of which four have been identified in the Federal Register as being threatened with extinction by invasive plants. Listed native species will benefit from the program actions by removing populations of highly ranked invasive plants that pose a threat to their survival.

More than 240 non-native plant species (30% of the Island's flora), including 76 invasive species now threaten the Island's 422 native plant species (including 32 endemic plant taxa) and it's unique habitats. Nearly 100 endangered, threatened or species of special concern, as well as imperiled and sensitive habitats, on Catalina are impacted to differing degrees by invasive plants.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
Wildlife Conservation Board	500,000
Catalina Island Conservancy	<u>445,889</u>
Total Project Cost	\$1,045,889

The proposed source of funds for this project is the FY 2004-05 appropriation to the Conservancy from the Habitat Conservation Fund created by the California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 (Proposition 117). Proposition 117 allows for the use of these funds for projects that serve to restore and enhance riparian habitat. Consistent with this source of funding, the Conservancy's funds will be used to implement the portions of the Catalina Island Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program that enhance and revegetate riparian corridors.

The Habitat Conservation Fund appropriation to the Conservancy in 2004-05 was derived from the Water Security, Clean Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50). Thus, the proposed project must also be consistent with the requirements of Proposition 50. Proposition 50 funds may be used for projects undertaken under the Conservancy's enabling legislation that protect coastal watersheds through the restoration of land and water resources (Water Code Section 79750(a)). The proposed project serves these objectives, since it will assist in restoring the land and resources of Catalina Island, including native plants, within the coastal watersheds of the island. As also required by Proposition 50 (Water Code Section 79507), the proposed project is consistent with local and regional watershed plans. See discussion under the heading "Consistency with Regional and Local Watershed Plans", below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251 *et seq.*), which authorizes the Conservancy's participation in coastal watershed enhancement projects.

Section 31251 of Chapter 6 allows the Conservancy to award grants for coastal resource enhancement where coastal resources have suffered loss of natural values due to human induced events. The proposed project seeks to remove invasive species introduced to the island's ecosystem by humans. Removal of non-native species will allow for restoration and recovery of the Island's indigenous species.

The proposed project is also consistent with Section 31252, which provides that all areas proposed for resource enhancement be identified in a certified local coastal plan or program as requiring public action to resolve existing or potential resource problems. The Santa Catalina Island Local Coastal Plan specifically identifies “Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas” and, consistent with the proposed project, calls for the removal of invasive species and the reintroduction of native plants from those areas. See the detailed discussion under the heading “Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies” below.

Finally, as required by Section 31253, staff has considered the urgency of the project, the availability of funding for other enhancement projects and the inability of CIC to fully fund the project through other sources in determining the amount of Conservancy funding for this project. In recommending the project for Conservancy approval, staff has also applied to the project the factors typically used to determine project priority and eligibility, as described in the “Consistency with Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines” section, below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 5, Objective A**, the proposed comprehensive restoration program would restore and enhance 696.3 acres in 68 watersheds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation” section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The Catalina Island Conservancy runs volunteer programs that contribute more than 20,000 hours of volunteer work to restoration and management of the natural resources on the Island. Volunteers work in the native plant nursery and will support implementation of this program. In addition, letters of support are provided in Exhibit 3.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of Los Angeles County.
5. **Need:** The CIC has committed significant resources to the development and implementation of this program, however additional funding is needed to fully implement the program. Conservancy funds are needed to ensure that the targeted invasive species are fully eradicated from the riparian corridors and watershed areas.

6. **Greater-than-local interest:** Catalina Island is one of the natural treasures of the state of California, it is home to fourteen endemic species. More than one million people visit the Island every year.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** For the past 10 years, the CIC has been working to remove feral and introduced animals from the Island. Although essential to the recovery of the native species, these programs have reviewed some invasive plant species from grazing and browsing pressure. In the 1990's following the removal of cattle from Santa Cruz Island, fennel populations exploded from hundreds to thousands of acres within a brief period of time. This cannot be allowed to happen on Catalina Island. Now is the time to stem the tide of invasion before the problem becomes too enormous for even collaborative efforts to remedy.
9. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
11. **Innovation:** This program is innovative in the comprehensive strategy that the CIC is using to address non-native species. The program is based on extensive field surveys that identified the abundance and distribution of invasive plants on Catalina. The CIC has developed a holistic management program that targets removal of the most invasive non-native species while restoring native plant species.
12. **Readiness:** The Wildlife Conservation Board funding has already been awarded and some work has started. This funding is needed to complete work in the next field season.
15. **Cooperation:** As discussed above, the CIC has an extensive volunteer program, and members of the public donate thousands of hours each year to work in the nursery and in the field, enhancing the resources of the Island. AmeriCorp and Conservation Corps members will be used to implement portions of this program.

CONSISTENCY WITH REGIONAL AND LOCAL WATERSHED PLANS

The Catalina Island Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program is a watershed based plan that was adopted by the Board of the Catalina Island Conservancy. The Catalina Island Habitat Improvement and Restoration Program is consistent with the Los Angeles County Santa Catalina Island Specific Plan, Chapter 22.46, Title 22, which was adopted as Ordinance 89-0148.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

The proposed project is consistent with the goals and policies of the Santa Catalina Island Local Coastal Plan for Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas. This section of the LCP, identifies six specific goals and objectives. The proposed project is consistent with the objective of developing "protection techniques for unique ecological resources of the Island, including species of plants and animals found only on the Island." The proposed project implements some of the plan policies and recommended actions, including:

- "17) Encourage continued efforts to propagate rare wild plants.
18) Prohibit intentional introduction, even for landscaping purposes, of non-native plants.

- 20) Control the most threatening non-native weeds by manual removal and topical application of weed killers on a localized level.”

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15304 in that it involves minor alternations to vegetation that will not impact mature, healthy or scenic trees. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of the proposed authorization.